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NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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NOAA's Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary Seeks Comments on Vessel Sewage Discharge Regulation Proposal

NOAA's Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary is seeking public input on a proposal to regulate sewage and graywater discharges from large vessels, including cruise ships and container ships, in sanctuary waters.

The proposed regulations, announced today in the Federal Register, would require large vessels of 300 gross registered tons or more to hold sewage and graywater on board while passing through the sanctuary. Nearly 7,000 large vessels transit the sanctuary each year using the shipping lanes that run through its northeastern edge.

The proposal is the result of a public process conducted in 2006 as part of the sanctuary's management plan review. During that process, NOAA received substantial public and agency comments requesting more stringent sanctuary regulation of sewage and graywater discharges from large ships, and consistency with the California Clean Coast Act.

"NOAA places a high value on public input, so when stakeholder comments told us that we should reconsider how we were proposing to regulate large vessel sewage and graywater discharges, we listened," said Chris Mobley, Channel Islands sanctuary superintendent. "We further analyzed this issue and decided to modify the changes we are proposing, and now we encourage the public to review and comment on those changes."

The proposal reflects concerns about the high volume of sewage and graywater that could be discharged in the sanctuary by large vessels. Vessel sewage is more concentrated than domestic land-based sewage and may contain disease-causing bacteria and viruses, along with high concentrations of nutrients that can harm the marine environment. Vessel graywater, which includes wastewater from galleys, baths and showers, may contain additional substances such as detergents, oil and grease, pesticides, food wastes and chemicals.

The proposed regulations are detailed in a supplemental draft environmental impact statement (EIS) and proposed rule. Copies of these documents and the 2006 draft EIS and proposed rule are available in the "Management Plan" section of the sanctuary's Web site, <http://channelislands.noaa.gov>, by e-mail request to mp.request@noaa.gov or by calling 805-884-1464.

NOAA will consider comments on the supplemental EIS and proposed rule and will provide responses in a final EIS and final rule. Comments must be submitted by May 30, 2008, and may be sent via mail to:

CINMS Management Plan Coordinator,
113 Harbor Way, Suite 150
Santa Barbara, CA 93109

Comments can also be provided via e-mail to cinms.mgtplan@noaa.gov, submitted online at <http://www.regulations.gov> (docket number NOAA-NOS-2007-0846), or faxed to 805-568-1582.

Designated in 1980, Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary encompasses the four northern Channel Islands and Santa Barbara Island off the coast of Southern California. With marine boundaries extending from the mean high water line of the islands' shores to approximately six nautical miles offshore, the sanctuary spans more than 1,100 square nautical miles, making it the nation's fourth-largest national marine sanctuary. The sanctuary supports a rich and diverse range of marine life and habitats and contains culturally significant resources such as hundreds of shipwrecks and submerged Chumash cultural artifacts.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

National Marine Sanctuary Program: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary: <http://channelislands.noaa.gov>